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136 have any fear of beasts. For, with the exception of man himself, the dog and pig which he has brought, the rat which came in his rafts or canoes, and the fruit bats that may have arrived nestling among his provisions, no mammals of any kind have reached these islands from the land-masses where they evolved. Thus, the native lives free from the fear of animals, or of anything worse than the climate, the mosquitoes, the hurricanes which sometimes spoil his crops or wreck his canoes; and the only living things he is ever called on to defend himself against are other men, as will be seen in the chapter on Warfare. Even the snakes are harmless—although the fear of them is great, owing largely to psychological causes taken advantage of by certain magicians said to have power to change themselves into these creatures, and possibly partly also to a racial memory of continental origin where snakes are physically harmful.

## DISTRICTS OF MALEKULA

101 619 The origin of the name Malekula is obscure. Though now used by those of the younger natives who have been on plantations and speak pidgin-English, there is no known native dialect to which it belongs. Dr. Ivens suggests that the first half of the word, which corresponds with that of Malaita in the Solomon Islands, means simply "people," and points out that in both islands overt descent is patrilineal, while their neighbours are for the most part matrilineal.[1] However this may be, no natives of any part of Malekula today possess any name for the whole island. This may be due partly to the restricted nature of their geographical knowledge,[2] but may also be attributed to the complete lack of any cohesion, either political or linguistic, or even racial, of the innumerable small groups that form its scattered population.

131 It is not my intention to attempt here any but the briefest survey of the cultures of Malekula, an island with an area of about 780 square miles (that is to say about half the size of Cornwall, which it resembles somewhat in shape), where, apart from other cultural differences, the languages are so numerous that each group of villages speaks a distinct dialect of its own sufficiently different from that of its neighbours that a journey of three miles often takes one into an entirely distinct linguistic area. So unknown are most parts of Malekula still today, and so intricate the mountain ranges that intersect it, that few parts of the interior have even been visited by a white man, and almost the whole of our very limited knowledge of it is confined to a few of the coastal districts.

[1] Ivens, 5, p. 20.

[2] This statement may seem strange in view of the existence of sea-going canoes. It is a fact, however, that in spite of their voyages to other islands over what I have termed the inland sea, not even traditions exist of any Small Island canoe having ever sailed round Malekula.

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## CHAPTER II

# THE SMALL ISLANDS AND VAO

133 THE term "Small Islands" is a pidgin-English one used by the natives of the coral islets fringing the north-east coast of Malekula in contrast to "Big Island," which they use in reference to the Malekulan mainland. These islets, each of which contains less than half a square mile of land, are due to outcrops of what Darwin calls a "fringing reef," caused by the action of coral polyps on the coast of land that has been raised by successive upward movements due to volcanic action. I have already called attention to the coral terraces on the adjacent mainland bearing witness to successive upheavals of this nature. Such fringing reefs are caused by the action of salt water, which encourages the growth of coral, combined with the contrary action of fresh water flowing down from the hills, which, together with the sediment which this fresh water brings with it, checks the activities of the polyps. The result is the formation of strong coral on the outer edge, combined with the decay or less vigorous growth of those parts nearest the land. Owing to the seaward flow of fresh water, in which coral will not grow, and to other causes, the outer edge breaks up into islands, between which and the land mass there forms a channel of varying depth. Owing to the causes outlined above, each Small Island has a good beach facing the channel, rises slightly towards the centre, and on the outer seaward side ends abruptly with a more or less elevated escarpment of coral rock. It is important to remember this formation for the bearing it has on the social organisation of these islands, owing to the greater desirability of the side facing the mainland and the bleakness of that facing the open sea.

There are seven of these islands, Vao, Atchin, Wala, Rano, Norsup, Uripiv and Uri, the inhabitants of which, together with those of the adjoining promontories of Pinalum and Tautu, form a loosely knit cultural unit of sufficient cohesion to refer to themselves collectively as "Sea Folk" (*muere n'das* in the language of Atchin) on account of their maritime situation and their common use of sea-going canoes, which the inhabitants of the mainland villages apart from the promontories do not possess. Each 161 island had at the time of my visit a population some 400 strong, with the exception of Uri, which was then almost depopulated, and Norsup, which is very small. Despite their small numbers and the loose cultural bond 197 already mentioned, however, the inhabitants of each island speak separate languages (excepting Wala and Rano, which, being very close

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together, share approximately the same dialect) and differ considerably one from the other as regards social organisation and ritual observances. These differences all occur nevertheless within certain cultural limits, such as the broad lines of megalithic culture which they all share in common and the matrilineal moieties which persist among them despite the overt patrilocal organisation, as well as many linguistic similarities over and above their common Austronesian basis, these similarities occurring most strikingly in the common use of the same, or approximately the same, terms in connexion with megalithic rites, of which the most obvious is their common use of the word Maki.

Of all these languages, that which differs from the others most is that of Vao, not only in vocabulary but also in pronunciation, since, by a peculiar forward movement of the tongue between the lips, certain consonants take on a very un-Malekulan form, making it difficult at first hearing to distinguish between, for example, *t* and *d*, or *m* and *n*. This is most striking to the European in its effect on the consonant which elsewhere in Malekula is pronounced *w* or *v*, and which in Vao sounds like a voiced *th* (*dh*) very similar to the *th* in the English word *the*. Other sound-changes are that Malekulan *g* is softened to *gh* and Malekulan *s* becomes *h*. A notable example is the pronunciation of the word used for the Guardian Ghost, which in Atchin (which retains the Malekulan consonants) is *Le-saw-saw* and in Vao is *Le-hev-hev*, pronounced in a manner that at first hearing I transcribed as *Le-heth-heth*. This sound *th* is characteristic also of certain tribes on Santo. Since all words in which it occurs can, however, be traced to their parallels on Atchin and elsewhere I do not propose to confuse the philological issue by rendering this aberration in print, and wherever this sound occurs in Vao I shall render it by the more usual Malekulan *v*.

From every one of these coral islets may be seen each morning, when the weather is not too stormy, a fleet of small canoes sailing or paddling to the mainland, where the natives of each island have their gardens. For the islets themselves are too small and their soil too shallow to support their population in garden produce, and are, moreover, largely given over to the rearing of pigs, which in their younger stages (before the tusks have appeared and are therefore liable to be damaged if their owners were allowed to run wild) are permitted to forage where they will. It is this habit that has given rise to the French saying that each island is a *parc au porcs*. This is not true if it be understood as meaning that the islands are a mass of wandering pigs; but is true to the extent that no young succulent plant is secure from the occasional ravages of these animals without very heavy fencing to protect it. For this reason the natives have their main gardens on the adjacent mainland, large tracts of which are regarded as the property of the island immediately facing it, and only certain ceremonial gardens surrounded by carefully